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ABSTRACT

This career brief describes the position of bilingual secretary and provides a general discussion of duties, possible working conditions, personal qualifications, educational requirements and opportunities, outlook, opportunities for men, earnings, and other factors which should be considered in the selection of one's career. (VM)

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Career BRIEF

BILINGUAL SECRETARY
201 (1-33)

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BILINGUAL SECRETARY

201 (1-33)

Definition

The Bilingual Secretary is a trained and skilled secretary who can translate business correspondence and papers to and from at least one foreign language. To succeed in this career, the aspirant must have both secretarial and language skills and knowledge.

History and Importance

The occupation of Secretary is not new. The Pharaohs of Egypt, the philosophers of Greece, and the Emperors of Rome all had persons to whom they entrusted affairs of a private and confidential nature. Because of the business transacted between different language groups, there must have been those who could translate business papers to and from at least two different languages.

During the past centuries, technological progress has increased the number of persons engaged in developing new enterprises. Countries in the world are no longer isolated, and the nations of the world have developed business transactions unequalled in history. The administration of international enterprises has created a demand for persons who are not only well-qualified Secretaries but who are equally well-versed in at least two languages.

Duties

The secretarial work performed by the Bilingual Secretary is much the same as that performed by any other Secretary. He or she is a confidential assistant to his or her employer or superior. She receives, sorts, and opens mail directed to her employer and may or may not open those letters marked "personal." She may, in many instances, answer the mail herself. She "screens" callers who wish to see her employer, referring some to other departments or persons and making appointments for those whose business concerns her boss directly. She is thoroughly familiar with the filing system used in her office; she may take care of her employer's personal files and bank account. She does, in fact, perform the routine tasks of a secretary. However, the main difference between the Bilingual Secretary's duties and those of other secretaries is that the Bilingual Secretary performs tasks which require knowledge of a foreign language. Skills in the written language are probably more important than speaking skills. She may take dictation in one language and transcribe it in another—from English to Spanish, or from French to English, etc. When foreign visitors call on her employer, the Bilingual Secretary may act as an interpreter. She may take notes at meetings, at office conferences, or at talks between her employer and callers. These notes may have to be transcribed in both languages. She may be required to translate correspondence written in a foreign language to her employer's language. Frequently, he or she may be required to take dictation in one language and translate it on the spot.

In an overseas assignment, the Bilingual Secretary may also be required to perform many of the duties of a social secretary, arranging parties and social activities for her employer and other administrative officials abroad. She may supervise the work of clerical help which may require giving instructions in a foreign language.

In many cases, the work carries a great deal of responsibility. The Bilingual Secretary must be fluent in the foreign language to prevent costly errors to his employer. He must plan and organize his work to acquire the greatest degree of efficiency. For example, he organizes and manages the preparation of important documents, channels work, and may supervise the purchase or requisition of supplies.

The special duties performed by the Bilingual Secretary, in addition to his or her language fluency, are determined by the type of employer for which he or she works and the kind of activities involved, such as business, social, or political.

In some offices, a regular secretary is employed with language skills to handle occasional bilingual communications.

Working Conditions

The conditions under which the Bilingual Secretary works vary. Much depends upon the nature of her employer's business, its geographical location, and the level and skill of the individual Secretary.

As a rule, she works in a well-equipped, well-lighted and ventilated office. Her working tools include typewriters (one may be for typing in a foreign language), pencils, pens, stationery, telephone, voice recorder and transcriber, as well as other office equipment, depending upon her specific duties.

There is very little monotony to the work since the tasks are many and varied. The nature of the work puts the Bilingual Secretary in contact with a variety of personalities and cultures. Frequently, her work requires an unusual amount of tact and diplomacy in dealing with foreign visitors or a "cranky" boss. She may have to work under pressure when important assignments have to be completed in a short time.

Sometimes her work may be very detailed and require close visual activity. At times, her duties may be mainly in dealing with others.

Bilingual Secretaries working abroad will find that living conditions vary considerably. The worker may have to adjust to different modes of travel, unfamiliar foods, lack of medical facilities, and different types of entertainment and social customs. Weather conditions may vary from long, rainy seasons to hot-humid weather.

Personal Qualifications

The Bilingual Secretary must have the ability to learn to spell well, use good grammar, compose letters on her own, use a dictating machine, set up a filing system, and develop a good working knowledge of at least two languages. In addition to the above, he or she should have a pleasing personality. She must be able to get along well with her co-workers and visitors. She should be able to create good will and understanding.

Dignity of manner, a good speaking voice, tact, initiative, responsibility,

dependability, intelligence, judgment, accuracy, and courtesy are traits looked for by most employers. A good memory is especially valuable in dealing with people as well as for retaining facts important to her employer. In addition, the Bilingual Secretary should be well-groomed at all times.

The Bilingual Secretary should know as much as possible about the business in which he is employed. He should be informed on subjects of current interest in order to talk intelligently with visitors and business contacts. He should be able to adapt to change and to switch from a very detailed task to another different task.

Educational Requirements

In addition to secretarial skills, the Bilingual Secretary must be skilled in a foreign language for conversation as well as for secretarial work. Aspirants should have at least two years' post-high school training in a foreign language. Those who are foreign born and speak, write, and have business training in their native tongue must learn English.

Employers who have considerable translation and interpretation work to be done have shown interest in hiring secretaries with junior or senior college training, or with a special business school background. Appropriate training would include courses such as English, stenography, typewriting (keyboards in a foreign language may be different), transcription, office practice, personnel orientation, and the operation of various office machines. In addition, study of a foreign language should include grammar, conversation, stenography, commercial correspondence, composition and word study, and translation technique. Many schools feel it is important for students to take as many liberal arts courses as possible, as well as those concerned with language and secretarial skills.

Elective courses in English, accounting, preparation of export documents, and a second foreign language (for example, Spanish and Portuguese because of their close relationship) might be considered.

A broad educational background which would include courses in political, economic, and social studies as well as cultural studies of the country of your language choice could prove especially beneficial.

Educational Opportunities

A growing number of junior colleges offer business training as well as language courses. Such a combination could prove satisfactory. Typical of such schools is Texas Technological College which developed a special bilingual secretarial educational course through the cooperation of its department of foreign languages and its department of secretarial administration. Consult any available junior college directory such as the one published by the American Council on Education. This and other appropriate directories are available in most school guidance offices and in many school and public libraries.

Some business schools, located in large metropolitan areas offer special programs to train Bilingual Secretaries. Check business schools in your area.

The United Business Schools Association, 1101 Seventeenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, makes available a free annual directory of business schools. While it does not indicate any specialized courses for Secre-

taries, it does serve as a listing of schools with which aspirants can check.

Two to four years in many business colleges where foreign language could be taken in another department would also be appropriate training. With a college background, the Secretary would be better qualified for promotion to higher positions of responsibility and, consequently, better earnings.

Outlook

There are several thousand Bilingual Secretaries employed by American firms today, both in the United States and abroad. Many new opportunities for these workers will be created by the anticipated expansion of international commerce and other activities. Most of these jobs are held by women, therefore, many vacancies will occur each year because many leave their jobs to get married or to assume family responsibilities.

With the rapid growth of international activity causing an increase in the amount of record keeping and correspondence, the demand for Bilingual Secretaries has greatly exceeded the number of persons qualified to perform the work. Employment opportunities will continue to grow and the long range outlook appears to be good for those with training and experience. The combination of Spanish-English is valuable to many import-export organizations and governmental agencies as our ties and trade with Latin and South America expand.

In some offices that only occasionally require the services of such a Secretary, some additional earnings may be paid those with bilingual abilities.

Opportunities for Men

There are some employment opportunities in this career field in which male Bilingual Secretaries are more acceptable than women. One of the reasons for this is that in some areas working conditions are more suitable for men, such as in isolated petroleum branch offices in the Far East. In some instances, employers who travel a great deal prefer male Bilingual Secretaries.

Frequently, a position as Bilingual Secretary is a stepping stone to an executive or administrative position for the male employee, hence the desirability of a college background.

Earnings

The earnings of the Bilingual Secretary vary according to the size and type of employing organization, the geographical location, and the skill and experience of the employee. As a general rule, the Bilingual Secretary earns higher pay than most secretaries with the exception of the executive secretary.

According to 1966 figures released by the Administrative Management Society, the average salary for secretaries on a national basis was $97 a week. Class A secretaries earn from $102 to over $120 a week. Lowest pay scales are in the South and the highest in the Far West and in the East Central United States. Some exceptionally well-qualified Bilingual Secretaries may earn over $150 a week.

Assignments abroad may also include payment of transportation to and

from assignments as well as housing or cost-of-living expenses. Paid vacations, group insurance benefits, retirement plans, and holidays with pay are normal.

Hours

Generally, Bilingual Secretaries work a standard five-day workweek. There may be occasions when her employer's obligations to foreign visitors may require her to act as an interpreter during "off-duty" hours. Those who travel with their employers may work irregular hours.

Bilingual Secetaries generally work from 37 to 40 hours a week with the majority working 40 hours according to the Administrative Management Society.

Advancement Prospects

Advancement prospects are good for the well-qualified and prepared Secretary. Advancement may take the form of periodic increases in salary with increased responsibilities. With an adequate educational background, advancement to junior executive or administrative positions would be a possibility.

Advantages

Employment opportunities are excellent for the well-trained Bilingual Secretary. Earnings are usually higher in this field than for many other secretarial positions. Employment in positions abroad are rewarding to those who enjoy traveling. The nature of this work, whether abroad or in this Country, gives the worker the opportunity to meet interesting people and to learn something of foreign countries. Advancement opportunities to positions of greater responsibility are good.

Disadvantages

A language misinterpretation could be costly to an employer; consequently, the work carries with it a great deal of responsibility.

Assignments abroad may subject the worker to unhealthy living conditions. Some may become homesick. Bilingual Secretaries may be required to work evenings or weekends to complete special assignments.

Where Employed

Bilingual Secretaries are employed by many major firms in most metropolitan areas of the United States. Many are employed by the Federal Government in overseas positions. Inter-American organizations, the United Nations, export houses, banking houses, foreign embassies in the United States, and more than 3,000 American firms operating in foreign countries employ Bilingual Secretaries.

How to Enter

Because there is such a demand for Bilingual Secretaries, many employers send recruiting teams to the campuses of colleges, universities, and

to business schools, junior colleges, and schools which specialize in training Bilingual Secretaries to recruit graduating students.

Local, state, and private employment agencies and want-ads in newspapers frequently list job opportunities. Announcements for government jobs, particularly in the diplomatic service, are posted in most Post Offices throughout the Nation.

Placement bureaus in business schools and colleges offer placement services to their graduates.

Many young people are successful in finding jobs by preparing letters and resumes and sending them to companies and groups that need the services of Bilingual Secretaries. Such "personal advertising" often results in a number of interviews.

Related Careers

The work performed by the Bilingual Secretary is closely related to many other office or clerical jobs, such as stenographer, clerk-typist, office manager, court stenographer, executive secretary, etc. The language skills required for this job may also be adaptable to such related careers as diplomatic secretary, foreign service secretary, foreign trade secretary, translater, interpreter, etc.

While in High School

Aspirants who wish to attend college should take an academic or college entrance program while in high school. This should include electives in shorthand, typing, and foreign languages.

Many junior colleges and business schools now stress the need for a broad program in high school with academic subjects.

Those who enter a business school should choose one in which they may include at least two years of language study. Electives in such courses as social studies, world history, geography, economics, and literature, could prove beneficial.

Measuring Your Interest and Ability

There are a number of ways in which a student may measure his or her interest and ability for this type of work while in high school. Part-time or full-time summer employment in an office would give opportunity to learn first-hand the nature of a Secretary's duties.

Language skill and interest can be measured by taking a foreign language in high school, by attending foreign movies, going to restaurants where service is conducted in foreign languages, joining language clubs, or by contact with foreign exchange students. Read all the literature you can about the culture and customs of the people of the country or countries in which the language is used.

For Further Information

Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas offers a catalog which would give an aspirant a good picture of the specialized courses appropriate for Bilingual Secretaries.

For information concerning job opportunities abroad, inquiries may be directed to the Office of Personnel, United Nations, United Nations Building, New York, New York; or to any non-profit educational, religious, or charitable organization, such as the Red Cross whose national office addresses may be obtained from your local branch office of the organization.

For a list of firms offering job opportunities, write to the Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20230, requesting bulletins titled "Employment Abroad—Reference Sources," free of charge; and "Sources of Information on American Firms," price—10¢.

The Pan American Union, Washington, D.C. will provide a list of many American firms doing business in Latin America.

Additional Readings

Your Career as a Secretary; United Business Schools Association, 1101 17th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, 24 pages, free.

The Successful Secretary; Royal Typewriter Company, Inc., School Department, 150 New Park Ave., Hartford, Conn. 06106, 1965 copyright, 30 pages, free.

Secretarial Futures; a Bulletin of Bryant College, News Bureau, Administration Building, Providence, Rhode Island. This consists of a series of lectures given students in the Secretarial Science School, 36 pages, free.

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